

Water and Culture

by **Gary Port**, Morogoro (Mzumbe), Tanzania

Here is a folk tale told to me by one of my Form VI chemistry students, Abdulrahim Omari, (equivalent to first year college). It is called "The Hare and the Water."

Once upon a time there was a village known as Singino. Many different animals—such as the elephant, giraffe, antelope, buffalo, hare, lion, tortoise, hyena, and wolf—lived in Singino. The giraffe was their king.

One day there was a shortage of water in the village. There were no natural springs and not enough rain. This was a big problem. King Giraffe called a meeting of all animals in the village to discuss how to solve the problem of water. They all agreed to dig a well which, they believed, would provide enough water for all. But Mr. Hare was against the idea. He didn't want to dig.

All the animals gathered together and dug the well. Mr. Hare did not help; instead he laughed at the animals as they were digging.

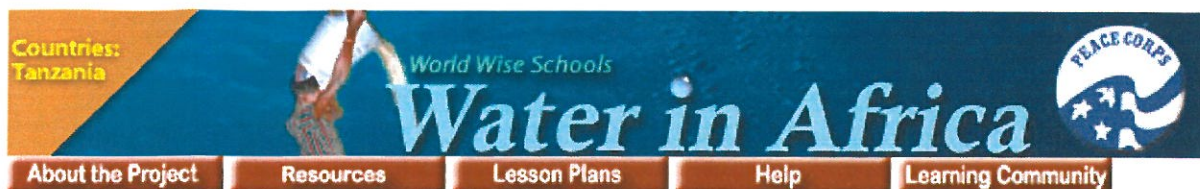
Within a short time, the animals had good, clean water. King Giraffe, however, prohibited Mr. Hare from using the well water.

Since Mr. Hare could not get water, he decided to trick the animals. He went to the elephant who was on duty to guard the well and said, "I have some honey, which is very sweet. Would you like to taste it?" The elephant tried some and, liking it very much, asked for more. Mr. Hare said, "I will give you more honey, but first I have to tie your hands and legs. You will enjoy it even more this way." Mr. Hare then tied up the elephant and jumped into the well. He drank some water, swam, and ran away laughing and laughing.

King Giraffe was very angry to hear that Mr. Hare tricked the elephant. The next day, King Giraffe made the antelope the well guard, but Mr. Hare tricked him too. The king tried each of the animals in the village, and the hare tricked each and every one of them. The king was furious.

Finally, it was tortoise's duty to guard the well. He sat inside the water waiting for Mr. Hare to come. The Hare eventually came and proudly jumped into the well thinking that there was no guard at all. But the tortoise caught him and took him to the king, who punished Mr. Hare severely.

Ever since then, the animals have lived in peace, enjoying their clean, fresh well water.



The Source of Our Water

by **Lorie Burnett**, Korogwe, Tanga Region, Tanzania

At my house I have indoor plumbing. The water comes from the river through a pumping mechanism or from nearby hills by gravity. When my water is cut off, I'm not sure if it's because of an actual water shortage, if it's because there's not enough water strength to reach my house, or if it's due to rationing. No one seems to be able to answer this. Few people here have running water in the house, but many get it from a spout centrally located on a street. A lot of people have houses that are equipped for plumbing, but still have no running water. During the dry season, fewer and fewer taps actually work. On several occasions last year, the school truck had to go off campus with loads of containers to fill up and bring back to school.

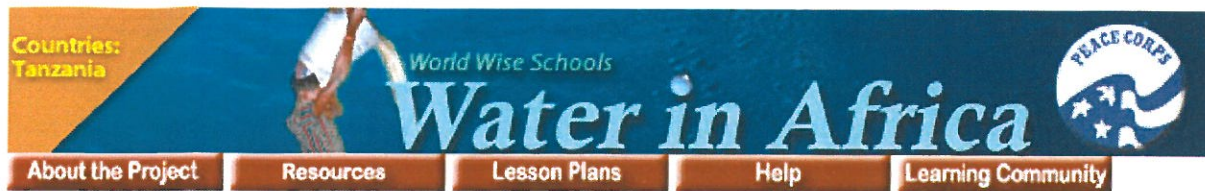
There have been a few months when water was very scarce, and I have truly been in fear of having to send someone down to the river for my water.

by **Gary Port**, Morogoro (Mzumbe), Tanzania

In my town, Mzumbe, water is piped in from a small village about 10 kilometers away, located in the Uluguru Mountains. We have two rainy seasons, November–December (short rains) and March through May (long rains). Apparently, it rains enough to keep the river flowing all year to supply both my town (about 2,000 people) as well as some local villages.

The water in the pipes is cool and clean. However, due to occasional cholera outbreaks, all water is boiled before drinking (even Tanzanians boil their water).

There have been a few times this past year when the pipes got clogged at the source. The authorities had to turn off the water for a few days. When this happened, we were forced to take the school truck to the river and fill up five-gallon buckets. This was done during class time so the students missed lessons.



Daily Usage

by **Lorie Burnett**, Korogwe, Tanga Region, Tanzania

I use water here for the same things I do in the United States—drinking, cooking, bathing, washing clothes, and watering plants. The difference is that I am much more conscious of how much I use here, since it is a valuable commodity. For about two months of my first year here, there was no water coming out of the taps. I had to keep my two 100-liter storage containers filled with water and I paid people to carry water from the tap at school (about half a kilometer away). I became acutely aware of how much water I used! Even when it's not the dry season, I try to find multiple uses for the same water. I water the trees I've planted outside with dishwashing water. I flush the toilet with bath water or water I've used to wash clothes. When I shower I catch water in a basin. I try to use water sparingly.

When my sister came to visit, we stayed in fancy hotels for a few days and I indulged myself in a few baths (something I used to love at home). But I didn't enjoy it as much because I kept thinking about how much water I was using, and what a waste it was! I'm quite sure that I use only a fraction of the water I'd use at home—cold showers just aren't as leisurely as warm baths—and I'm sure that washing clothing in buckets uses less water than a washing machine.

by **Gary Port**, Morogoro (Mzumbe), Tanzania

For me, water use isn't much different here than back in the United States. In my home here, I have a flush toilet that actually uses more water than a gallon flush toilet back home, and I take showers daily, although with only cold water. Laundry takes up most of my water during the rinse—about 10 gallons for one small load.

In my community, many teachers at my school have fields with corn, tomatoes, banana trees, and other plants. They usually water them with a hose and sprinkler, or else they dig small irrigation trenches and turn on the faucet.

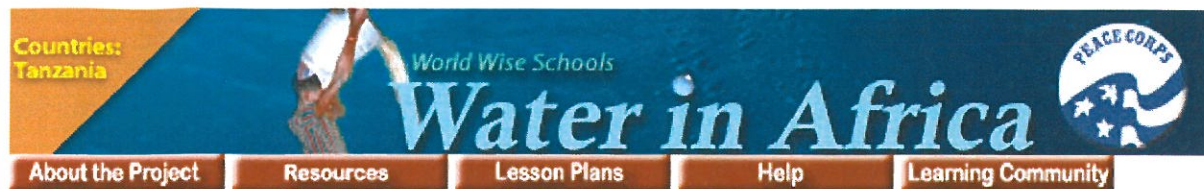
People here use water to clean floors (*kupiga deki*, which means to hit the deck). After sweeping the concrete floors, a towel is soaked and used to mop up.

At school during the dry seasons, students have to fill buckets of water and wet the dirt patches so not a lot of dust is stirred up.

We also use quite a lot of water in my chemistry lab (usually distilled water) for experiments and cleaning up.

I haven't yet seen kids having water fights, or running through sprinklers. Maybe it hasn't occurred to them. I've seen some Tanzanians swim in the river, but it seems to be rare.

A dam was built in my town a few year ago and the reservoir is now used to raise fish to sell in the market.



Managing Water

by **Lorie Burnett**, Korogwe, Tanga Region, Tanzania

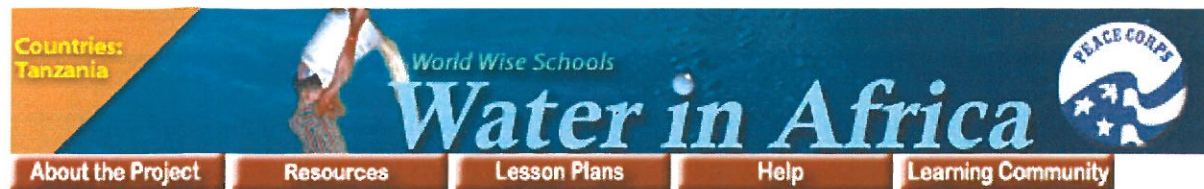
Every day I see a woman with a bucket on her head fetching water from some distant location to take home. This seems to be purely women's work within the family, though some of the people I paid to fetch water for me were boys.

There is no irrigation to speak of here; people rely on the rains. Recent El Niño and La Niña weather changes have caused disruptions in planting and have sometimes harmed crops.

by **Gary Port**, Morogoro (Mzumbe), Tanzania

My secondary school is in charge of their own water and the lines that run from the source. They were built back in the early 1960s. Now the headmaster (equivalent of principal) is in charge of sending plumbers to repair breaks and leaks.

The teachers at my school are also small-scale farmers who grow corn, tomatoes, etc. Officially, they are supposed to get permission to use the school water for gardens, but they just use it.



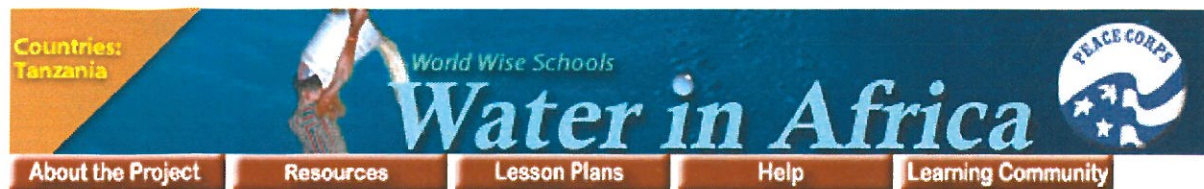
Conservation

by **Lorie Burnett**, Korogwe, Tanga Region, Tanzania

Although there is mandatory rationing by the water department, people seem to be wasteful of water, which is surprising since it is so hard to come by. For example, it is a custom to mop the floor every day. This seems unnecessary, especially if water is scarce. But it's what people do. When I lived with a Tanzanian woman for two months, she seemed to use a lot of water and made no effort to re-use it. This might be because it was coming from a tap. Perhaps in other circumstances she would have been more careful (that is, if she had to fetch water from a river herself).

by **Gary Port**, Morogoro (Mzumbe), Tanzania

Luckily, there haven't been any shortages in my town, but during the dry season, water pressure is lower and is turned off periodically. The community is usually told where they can find water for personal use and for farming. There is no recycling.



The Environment and Agriculture

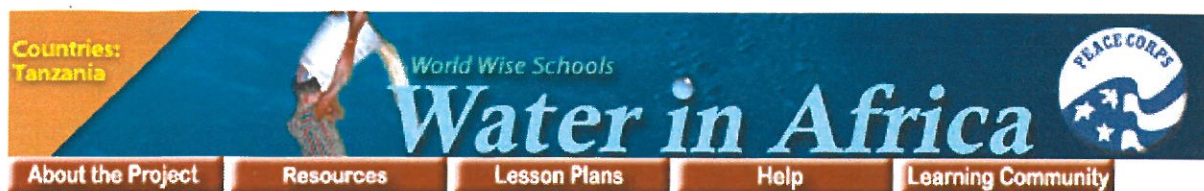
by **Lorie Burnett**, Korogwe, Tanga Region, Tanzania

World Vision is working on a catchment dam project designed to catch rainwater. This is supposed to improve the village's water supply (not in my village, Korogwe, but in another town).

by **Gary Port**, Morogoro (Mzumbe), Tanzania

Since the installation of new pipes as well as the construction of water towers in my town (both to store water and to provide water), the quality of water has been much improved. People can now devote more of their time to other things, such as education, instead of fetching water from the river.

As far as the environment is concerned, only a very limited amount of pollution has taken place, from plastic bags which clog pipes to the insecticides farmers use in the mountain. But overall, the quality of water hasn't changed drastically.



Health and Nutrition

by **Lorie Burnett**, Korogwe, Tanga Region, Tanzania

Water comes from pipes and is clean except in the beginning of the rainy season, when it is visibly muddy. During those times, I sift the water through a T-shirt and then let the rest of the impurities settle to the bottom of the storage containers. I always boil water for drinking, but all other water—including water for brushing my teeth—I just use straight from the tap.

I have seen people gathering water from stagnant-looking ponds and I am fairly sure that for people in the villages, without electricity, it is not customary to boil water. This is mostly due to the lack of knowledge of the importance of boiling water. Further, boiling water would require even more firewood, an often-precious commodity that people carry for great distances.

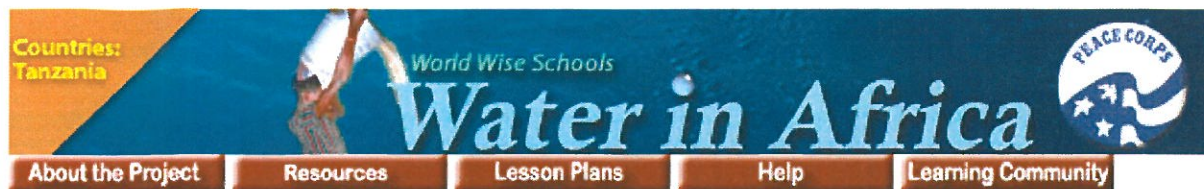
Occasionally, there are outbreaks of cholera or typhoid due to the contaminated water, but I have not yet witnessed one of these.

I lived with a host family in Ausha who was well-off by Tanzanian standards. They boiled their drinking water. I imagine this is the case among people who are educated and who have the financial means.

by **Gary Port**, Morogoro (Mzumbe), Tanzania

The drinking water is usually very clear, but still unsuitable for immediate drinking, due to the contamination by cholera. All water here is boiled before drinking. A few years back an attempt was made to treat the water with chlorine. A container of chlorine was placed in the large storage tank with a timer to release a certain dose periodically. But the people found that this process was too expensive and too high a concentration of chlorine was needed to sterilize the water. Also, the water didn't sit in the tank long enough before people used it. They eventually returned to just boiling water. The trouble with boiling, however, is that heating enough water for over 1,500 people every day takes a lot of firewood and energy, so it is quite expensive. Some of the poorer families can't afford this so they risk cholera infection drinking unboiled water.

When a cholera outbreak occurs here, it's a very dangerous and serious matter. Last year, a few local people died of the disease.



Transportation

by **Lorie Burnett**, Korogwe, Tanga Region, Tanzania

We are not near a river. Even so, the closest river is not used for transportation.

I am about 60 miles from the coastal city of Tanga, which is an important port here for exporting goods, as well as for transport to Kenya and to the islands of Reinba and Zanzibar.

by **Gary Port**, Morogoro (Mzumbe), Tanzania

I live near a small dam used for breeding fish and a small river which is our water source. Neither is used for transportation.

Three hours away though, in Dar Es Salaam—the capital—ships transport goods from abroad. The locals use dhows, wooden sailboats with a single sail made from cloth.



Other Stories

by **Lorie Burnett**, Korogwe, Tanga Region, Tanzania

One day, I was walking from my house to school, which is a 10-minute walk. All of a sudden, rain began to pour and, of course, I had no umbrella. I was carrying a big bag of schoolbooks. I ran and ducked into an alcove to wait it out, feeling cold and soaking wet. The rain didn't seem to be letting up at all and I debated as to whether to just make a run for it and go to my class, or to wait it out. Then I saw two of my Form I students (8th grade) coming with a huge umbrella. They had seen me shivering there and came to help me make it to class.